

Locking mechanism for disk drive carrier enclosure system

This application claims priority from US appl. no. 60/270,940, filed February 22, 2001, which application is hereby incorporated herein by reference.

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Background

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A variety of economic, social and technological changes in recent years have prompted intense interest in reliable and dense storage systems. The Internet requires companies to set up web and commerce servers which require storage systems. Editing and storage of media such as video call for large amounts of storage from which it is desired to retrieve arbitrary portions without undue delay. It is desirable for these systems to be rack-mountable in standardized 19-inch racks. These and other applications have led to the development of storage systems made up of large numbers of hard disk drives. In such a system it is desired that each drive be individually removable and replaceable. This generally leads to a system having an enclosure or shelf with a dozen or more slots into which disk drive carriers may slide. Each carrier has a bezel and handle assembly which is visible when the carrier has been inserted into the enclosure. The bezel serves a number of important functions, including providing a uniform appearance of the system when its slots are fully populated with carriers. The handle is used to assist in extraction of the carrier and to assist in insertion of the carrier.

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Balanced against ease of removal and replacement, however, is the concern that a drive carrier should not be at risk of inadvertent removal, and that it should not be disposed to vibrate loose from its operating position. It is thus necessary to devise a locking system that locks each carrier into place except in the rare instances in which it is desired that a carrier be capable of being removed. Each carrier must be individually capable of being locked or unlocked, separately from any other carrier.

Yet another design constraint is that it is desired to fit as many drives (and carriers) as possible

into an enclosure, and to minimize the number of "rack units" (units of vertical spacing of 1.75 inches) taken up by the enclosure. This makes the front-panel area of the enclosure (chiefly the bezel and handle portions) valuable and scarce. Some prior-art locking arrangements have symbols indicative of the locked and unlocked conditions, which take up valuable space and may not be easy to distinguish in suboptimal viewing conditions.

Experience shows that damage can occur to a carrier, to the enclosure, or to both, in instances in which a user tries to remove a carrier that is locked. Under the best of circumstances it may not be easy to distinguish between the locked and unlocked configurations of a carrier. Some rack-mounted systems, however, are behind perforated doors, Lexan doors, or other obstructions.

Some prior-art mechanisms which are intended to provide an indication of the locked or unlocked status of a carrier are mechanically complicated, do not provide unambiguous indications, or have features which take up valuable space in the bezel/handle assembly.

It is thus desirable to have a locking mechanism and related system which is mechanically simple, which provides unambiguous indication of the locked or unlocked status of each carrier, and which do not take up valuable space in the bezel/handle assembly.

Summary of the invention

In a disk drive enclosure system having carriers fitting into slots in the enclosure, each carrier has a lock mechanism. The lock mechanism has a part which rotates between locked and unlocked positions, and the part has a feature that blocks removal of the carrier when the part is in the locked position, while permitting removal of the carrier when the part is in the unlocked position.

The part is plastic and is molded of a clear material serving as a light pipe. A light source is behind the part, so that the ability of light to pass through the part is affected by the locked/unlocked position of the part. The part has a shape feature that assists a user in distinguishing between locked and unlocked positions, and the light indicator further assists the user in this way. Valuable bezel space is saved, especially in comparison with some prior-art

locking mechanisms.

Description of the drawings

5 The invention will be described with respect to a drawing in several figures, of which:

Fig. 1a is a perspective view of a disk drive carrier according to a first embodiment of the invention, showing the carrier in an unlocked configuration;

10 Fig. 1b is a more detailed view of a portion of the carrier of Fig. 1a;

Fig. 2a is the carrier of Fig. 1a, but shown in a locked configuration, with an illuminated indicator;

Fig. 2b is a more detailed view of a portion of the carrier of Fig. 2a;

15 Fig. 3a is a detailed perspective view of a disk drive carrier according to a second embodiment of the invention, showing the carrier in a locked configuration;

20 Fig. 3b is the carrier of Fig. 3a, but shown in an unlocked configuration, with an illuminated indicator;

Fig. 4a is a detailed perspective view of a disk drive carrier according to a third embodiment of the invention, showing the carrier in a locked configuration;

25 Fig. 4b is the carrier of Fig. 4a, but shown in an unlocked configuration, with an illuminated indicator;

Fig. 5a shows in front perspective view the moving part of a lock mechanism according to the second embodiment of the invention, in a locked configuration;

Fig. 5b shows in front perspective view the moving part of the lock mechanism of Fig. 5a in an unlocked configuration;

Fig. 5c is the part of Fig. 5a, but in rear perspective view;

Fig. 5d is the part of Fig. 5b, but in rear perspective view;

Fig. 6a shows in front perspective view the moving part of a lock mechanism according to the third embodiment of the invention, in a locked configuration;

Fig. 6b shows in front perspective view the moving part of the lock mechanism of Fig. 6a in an unlocked configuration;

Fig. 6c is the part of Fig. 6a, but in rear perspective view;

Fig. 6d is the part of Fig. 6b, but in rear perspective view;

Fig. 7a is a detailed perspective view of a carrier according to the first embodiment of the invention, showing the carrier in an unlocked configuration; and

Fig. 7b is the carrier of Fig. 7a, but in a locked configuration.

Detailed description

In an exemplary embodiment, the enclosure is cast from top and bottom pieces of a magnesium alloy as described in PCT publication number WO 01/72173, assigned to the same assignee as the assignee of the present invention, and incorporated herein by reference. The guides defining slots may have wedges formed therein as described in PCT publication number WO 01/73790, assigned to the same assignee as the assignee of the present invention, and incorporated herein by

reference. Fig. 1a shows a typical disk drive carrier 26 in perspective view. The carrier 26 slides into the enclosure on guides 20, leaving only the bezel/handle assembly (at the front of Fig. 1a) visible after insertion. Handle 22 may be seen, as well as a lock/unlock indicator 21 about which more will be said below. Bezel 25 may also be seen.

Fig. 1b shows the carrier of Fig. 1a in more detail. Optional ventilation holes 24 may be provided so that a positive or negative pressure within the enclosure draws air out of or into the holes 24 to assist in cooling the disk drive within the carrier. Optional lights 23 may indicate disk drive activity or other helpful information. Indicator 21 is more clearly visible in this view; its vertical orientation is indicative of the unlocked condition.

Fig. 7a shows a visual variant of the arrangement of Fig. 1b, having indicator 41 showing an unlocked condition.

Turning now to Fig. 2a, what may be seen is the carrier of Fig. 1a, but in a locked condition. Fig. 2b shows the indicator 21 in a locked position. In a typical arrangement the indicator will be internally illuminated, for example in red, indicative of the locked condition. Fig. 7b shows a visual variant of the arrangement of Fig. 2b, again having indicator 41 showing a locked condition.

A second embodiment of the invention will now be discussed. In this embodiment there is an indicator 21, shown in Fig. 3b, indicative of an unlocked condition. Optionally there is a release button 32 which may be pressed to eject a handle 39 which is then used to extract the carrier. If, on the other hand, the indicator 21 is indicative of a locked condition, as shown in Fig. 3a, then it is not possible to remove the carrier. For example the locked condition may make it impossible to press the button 32, or impossible to operate the handle 39, or both. In a typical arrangement, the indicator 21 will be illuminated to indicate the unlocked position, for example with green light.

The indicator 21 may be seen in isolated perspective view in Fig. 5a. A feature 35 locks the

carrier, for example by engaging with button 32 or handle 39 as previously mentioned. If the indicator 21 is rotated about a quarter of a turn, as shown in Fig. 5b, then the feature 35 no longer engages the button 32 or handle 39. Figs. 5c and 5d show the rear of the part 21 in locked and unlocked configurations respectively. A rearmost feature 36 of the part 21 provides a light transmitting face which selectively lines up with a light source, omitted for clarity in Figs. 5c and 5d. The light source is preferably a light-emitting diode. For example the light source may be positioned to be juxtaposed with feature 36 when the part 21 is in the unlocked position, that is, in the position of Fig. 5d.

A third embodiment is shown in Fig. 4b. Indicator 31 is vertical, indicating an unlocked position. If the indicator is rotated about a quarter of a turn, as shown in Fig. 4a, then the carrier is locked. Figs. 6a and 6b show the part 31 in isolated perspective view. Again, feature 35 engages other parts (omitted for clarity in Fig. 6a) which lock the carrier into the enclosure. Two positions 41, 42 are shown where light sources may be located. Light source 41 lights up the part 31 when it is locked, while light source 42 lights up the part 31 when it is unlocked. Figs. 6c and 6d show the part 31 in rear perspective isolated view, and feature 36 is a face which is juxtaposed with a light source at position 41 or 42. The light source at 41 may be no light, while the light source at 42 may be red light, indicating a locked condition. Alternatively, the light source at 41 may be a green light indicative of an unlocked condition.

It will be appreciated, then, that what has been disclosed is a lock mechanism that is an integral part of a disk drive carrier bezel/handle assembly. The lock mechanism keying feature protrudes (male). A user may use a key to turn the lock mechanism, the key being indented with the negative (female) pattern matching the lock mechanism keying feature. In keeping with the invention, two salient features are provided.

First, the lock mechanism keying feature is shaped to resemble a pointer such as an arrow. This pointer, visible from the front of the carrier, points toward one of two symbols (also integral to the carrier bezel/handle assembly) or in a direction which provides an obvious indication to the

user that the mechanism is locked or unlocked.

Second, the lock mechanism is plastic, molded of a clear material and designed to act as a light pipe. The rear of the lock mechanism light pipe allows light from an LED (light emitting diode) to pass through in either the locked or unlocked position. Thus, from the front of the carrier, the user will see the lock pointer is “on” when the carrier is locked for example. As will be appreciated the light can be any color and instead of showing an on/off condition, can show red/green. In this way, symbols indicative of locked and unlocked conditions may be eliminated, which frees up valuable space in the bezel area.

Those skilled in the art can readily devise myriad obvious variants and improvements, all of which are included within the scope of the claims which follow.